

LONG LIVE THE KING

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CHAPTER I.

The Crown Prince Runs Away.

The Crown Prince sat in the royal box and swung his legs. This was hardly princely, but the royal legs did not quite reach the floor from the high crimson-velvet seat of his chair.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto was bored. His royal robes, consisting of a pair of blue serge trousers, a short blue jacket, and a stiff, rolling collar of white linen, irked him.

He had been brought to the opera house under a misapprehension. His aunt, the Archduchess Annunziata, had strongly advocated "The Flying Dutchman," and his English governess, Miss Braithwaite, had read him some inspiring literature about it. So here he was, and the Flying Dutchman was not ghostly at all, nor did it fly. And instead of flying, after dreary eons of singing, it was moved off on creaky rollers by men whose shadows were thrown grotesquely on the sea background.

The orchestra, assisted by a bass solo and intermittent thunder in the wings, was making a deafening din. One of the shadows on the sea background took out its handkerchief and wiped its nose.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto looked across at the other royal box, and caught his Cousin Hedwig's eye. She also had seen the handkerchief; she took out her own scrap of linen, and mimicked the shadow. Then, Her Royal Highness the Archduchess Annunziata being occupied with the storm, she winked across at Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

In the opposite box were his two cousins, the Princesses Hedwig and Hilda, attended by Hedwig's lady in waiting. Hedwig was eighteen. The crown prince liked Hedwig better than Hilda. Although she had been introduced formally to the court at the Christmas-eve ball, and had been duly presented by her grandfather, the king, with the usual string of pearls and her own carriage, she still ran off now and then to have tea with the crown prince and Miss Braithwaite in the school room at the palace; and she could eat a great deal of bread and butter.

The crown prince yawned, although it was but the middle of the afternoon. Catching Hedwig's eye, he ran his fingers up through his thick yellow hair and grinned. Hedwig blushed. She had confided to him once, while they were walking in the garden at the summer palace, that she was thinking of being in love with a young lieutenant who was attached to the king's suite. The prince—who was called Otto, for short, by the family, because he actually had eleven names—the prince had been much interested. For some time afterward he had bothered Miss Braithwaite to define being in love, but he had had no really satisfactory answer.

In pursuance of his quest for information, he had grown quite friendly with the young officer, whose name was Larisch, and had finally asked to have him ride with him at the royal riding school. The grim old king had granted the request, but it had been quite fruitless so far after all. Lieutenant Larisch only grew quite red as to the ears when love was mentioned, although he appeared not unwilling to hear Hedwig's name.

So now Ferdinand William Otto ran his fingers through his fair hair, which was a favorite gesture of the lieutenant's, and Hedwig blushed. The archduchess, sitting well back, was nodding. Just outside the royal box, on the red velvet sofa, General Mettlich, who was the chancellor, and had come because he had been invited and stayed outside because he said he liked to hear music, not see it, was sound asleep. His martial bosom, with its gold braid, was rising and falling peacefully. Beside him lay the prince's crown, a small black derby hat.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered it all very wearisome. If one could only wander around the corridor or buy a sandwich from the stand at the foot of the great staircase—or, better still, if one could only get to the street, alone, and purchase one of the big women that Miss Braithwaite so despised! The crown prince felt in his pocket, where his week's allowance of pocket money lay comfortably untouched.

He meditated. He could go out quickly, and be back before they knew it. Even if he only wandered about the corridor, it would stretch his short legs. And outside it was a fine day. It looked already like spring.

With the trepidation of a canary who finds his cage door open, and, hopping to the threshold, surveys the world before venturing to explore it, Prince Ferdinand William Otto rose to his feet, tiptoed past the Archduchess Annunziata, who did not move, and looked around him from the doorway.

He picked up his hat and concealed it by his side. Then, unconsciously, as if to stretch his legs by walking ten feet up the corridor and back, he glanced the dressing room door. Another moment, and he was out of sight around a bend of the passageway, and before him lay liberty.

Not quite! At the top of the private staircase reserved for the royal family a guard commonly stood. He had moved a few feet from his post, however, and was watching the stage through the half-open door of a private loge.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto passed behind him with outward calmness. At the top of the public staircase, however, he hesitated. Here, everywhere, were brass-buttoned officials of the opera house. A gardener woman stared at him curiously. The little prince looked at the woman with appeal in his eyes. Then, with his heart thumping, he ran past her, down the white marble staircase, to where the great doors promised liberty.

Olga, the wardrobe woman, came out from behind her counter and stood looking down the marble staircase after the small flying figure.

The old soldier who rented opera glasses at the second landing, and who had left a leg in Bosnia, leaned over the railing. "Look at that!" he exclaimed. "He will break a leg, the young rascal! Once I could have—but there, he is safe! The good God watches over fools and children."

"It looked like the little prince," said the wardrobe woman. "I have seen him often—he has the same bright hair."

But the opera-glass man was not listening. He had drawn a long sausage from one pocket and a roll from the other, and now, retiring to a far window, he stood placidly eating—a bite of sausage, a bite of bread. His mind was in Bosnia, with his leg. And because old Adelbert's mind was in Bosnia, and because one hears with the mind, and not with the ear, he did not hear the sharp question of the sentry who ran down the stairs, and passed for a second at the cloakroom. Well for Olga, too, that old Adelbert did not hear her reply.

"He has not passed here," she said, with wide and honest eyes, but with an ear toward old Adelbert. "An old gentleman came a moment ago and got a sandwich, which he had left in his overcoat. Perhaps this is whom you are seeking?"

The sentry cursed, and ran down the staircase, the nails in his shoes striking sharply on the marble.

Olga of the cloak room leaned over her checks, with her lips curved up in a smile. "The little one!" she thought. "And such courage! He will make a great king! Let him have his frank like the other children, and—God bless him and keep him!"

The crown prince was just a trifle dazzled by the brilliance of his success. He paused for one breathless moment under the porte-cochere of the opera house; then he took a long breath, turned to the left; and was at once swallowed up in the street crowd. It seemed very strange to him. Not that he was unaccustomed to crowds. Had he not, that very Christmas, gone shopping in the city, accompanied only by one of his tutors and Miss Braithwaite, and bought for his grandfather, the king, a burnt wood box, which might hold either neckties or gloves, and for his cousins silver photograph frames?

But this was different, and for a rather peculiar reason. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never seen the back of a crowd! The public was always lined up, facing him, smiling and bowing and God-blessing him. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never known the backs could be so rigid. It was most interesting.

The next tour was full of remarkable things. For one, he dodged behind a street car and was almost run over by a taxicab. The policeman on the corner came out, and taking Ferdinand William Otto by the shoulder, gave him a talking to and a shaking. Ferdinand William Otto was furious, but policy kept him silent; which proves conclusively that the crown prince had not only initiative—witness his flight—but self-control and diplomacy. Lucky country, to have in prospect such a king!

Prince Ferdinand William Otto had the fulfillment of a great desire in his small, active mind. This was nothing less than a ride on the American scenic railroad, which had secured a concession in a far corner of the park. Hedwig's lieutenant had described it to him—how one was taken in a small car to a dizzy height, and then turned loose on a track which dropped giddily and rose again, which hurled one through sheet-iron tunnels of incredible blackness, thrust one out over a gorge, whirled one in mad curves around corners of precipitous heights, and finally landed one, panting, breathless, shocked, and reeling, but safe, at the very platform where one had purchased one's ticket three eternities, which were only minutes, before.

As the early spring twilight fell, the gas lamps along the alley, always burning, made a twin row of pale stars ahead. At the end, even as the wanderer gazed, he saw myriads of tiny red, white, and blue lights, rising high in the air, outlining the crags and peaks of the sheet iron mountain which was his destination. The land of desire was very near!

There came to his ears, too, the occasional rumble that told of some palpitating soul being at that moment buried and twisted and joyously thrilled, as per the lieutenant's description.

Now it is a strange thing, but true, that one does not reach the land of desire alone; because the half of pleasure is the sharing of it with some one else, and the land of desire, alone, is not the land of desire at all. Quite suddenly, Prince Ferdinand William Otto discovered that he was lonely. At that moment there was a soft whirling off to one side of him, and a yellow bird, rising and falling erratically on the breeze, careened suddenly and fell at his feet.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto bent down and picked it up. It was a small toy aeroplane, with yellow silk planes.



"Gee! Did You See It Go That Time?"

guy ropes of waxed thread, and a wooden rudder, its motive power vested in a tightly twisted rubber. One of the wings was bent. Ferdinand William Otto straightened it, and looked around for the owner.

A small boy was standing under the next gas lamp. "Gee!" he said in English. "Did you see it go that time?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto eyed the stranger. He was about his own age, and was dressed in a short pair of corduroy trousers, much bloomed at the knee, a pair of yellow Russian-leather shoes that reached well to his calves, and, over all, a shaggy white sweater, rolling almost to his chin. On the very back of his head he had the smallest cap that Prince Ferdinand William Otto had ever seen.

"This is the best time for flying," he said, in his perfect English. "All the exhibition flights are at sundown." The boy walked slowly over and stood looking down at him. "You ought to see it fly from the top of Pike's Peak!" he remarked. He had caught sight of the despoiled derby, and his eyes widened, but with instinctive good breeding he ignored it. "That's Pike's Peak up there."

He indicated the very top of the land of desire. The prince stared up. "How does one get up?" he queried. "Ladders. My father's the manager. He lets me up sometimes."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto stared with new awe at the boy. He found the fact much more remarkable than if the stranger had stated that his father was the king of England. Kings were, as you may say, directly in Prince Ferdinand William Otto's line, but scenic railroads—

"I had thought of taking a journey on it," he said, after a second's reflection. "Do you think your father will sell me a ticket?"

"Billy Grimm will. I'll go with you."

The prince rose with alacrity. Then he stopped. He must, of course, ask the strange boy to be his guest. But two tickets! Perhaps his allowance was not sufficient.

"I must see first how much it costs," he said with dignity.

The other boy laughed. "Oh, gee! You come with me. It won't cost anything," he said, and led the way toward the towering lights.

For Bobby Thorpe to bring a small boy to ride with him was an everyday affair. Billy Grimm, at the ticket window, hardly glanced at the boy who stood, trembling with anticipation, in the shadow of the booth.

The car came, and they climbed in. Perhaps, as they moved off, Prince Ferdinand William Otto had a qualm, occasioned by the remembrance of the English child who had met an untimely end; but if he did, he pluckily hid it.

"Put your lid on the floor of the car," said Bobby Thorpe, depositing his own hat there. "Father says, if you do that, you're perfectly safe."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto divided that this referred to his hat, and drew a small breath of relief. And

then they were off, up an endless, clattering roadway, where at the top the car hung for a breathless second over the gulch below; then, fairly launched, out on a trestle, with the city far beneath them, and only the red, white, and blue lights for company; and into a tunnel, filled with roaring noises and swift-moving shadows. Then came the end of all things—a flying leap down, a heart-breaking, delicious thrill, an upward sweep just as the strain was too great for endurance.

Above the roaring of the wind in their ears, neither child had heard the flying feet of a dozen horses coming down the alley. They never knew that a hatless young lieutenant, white-lipped with fear, had checked his horse to its haunches at the ticket booth, and demanded to know who was in the land of desire.

"Only the son of the manager, and a boy friend of his," replied Billy Grimm, in what he called the lingo of the country. "What's wrong? Lost anybody?"

But Hedwig's lieutenant had wheeled his horse without a word, and, jumping him over the hedge of the alley, was off in a despairing search of the outskirts of the park, followed by his cavaliers.

As the last horse leaped the hedge and disappeared, the car came to a stop at the platform. Quivering, Prince Ferdinand William Otto reached down for the despoiled hat.

"Would you like to go around again?" asked Bobby, quite casually.

His highness gasped with joy. "If—if you would be so kind?" he said.

And at the lordly wave of Bobby's hand, the car moved on.

CHAPTER II.

Disgraced.

At eight o'clock that evening the Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto approached the palace through the public square. He approached it slowly, for two reasons. First, he did not want to go back. Second, he was rather frightened. He had an idea that they would be disagreeable.

There seemed to be a great deal going on at the palace. Carriages were rolling in under the stone archway and, having discharged their contents, mostly gentlemen in uniform, were moving off with a thundering of hoofs that reached from the vaulted roof of the entrance. All the lights were on in the wing where his grandfather, the king, lived alone. As his grandfather hated lights, and went to bed early, Prince Ferdinand William Otto was slightly puzzled.

He was very dirty. His august face was streaked with soot, and his august hands likewise. His small derby hat was carefully placed on the very back of his head at the angle of the American boy's cap. As his collar had scratched his neck, he had, at Bobby's suggestion, taken it off and rolled it up. He decided, as he waited in the square, to put it on again. Miss Braithwaite was very peculiar about collars.

Came a lull in the line of carriages. Prince Ferdinand William Otto took a long breath and started forward. As he advanced he stuck his hands in his pockets and swaggered a trifle. It was, as nearly as possible, an exact imitation of Bobby Thorpe's walk. And to keep up his courage, he quoted that young gentleman's farewell speech to himself: "What'd you care? They won't eat you, will they?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto stood in the shadows and glanced across. The sentries stood like wooden men, but something was wrong in the court yard inside. The guards were all standing, and there seemed to be a great many of them. And just as he had made up his mind to take the plunge, so to speak, a part of his own regiment of cavalry came out from the court yard with a thundering of hoofs, wheeled at the street, and clattered off.

Very unusual, all of it.

The Crown Prince Ferdinand Otto felt in his pocket for his handkerchief, and, moistening a corner with his tongue, wiped his face. Then he wiped his shoes. Then, with his hands in his trousers pockets, he sauntered into the light.

The two sentries made no sign when they saw Ferdinand William Otto approaching. But one of them forgot to bring his musket to salute. He crossed himself instead. And something strained around the other sentry's lower jaw suddenly relaxed into a smile as his royal highness drew a hand from its refuge and saluted. He glanced at one, then at the other, rather sheepishly, hesitated between them, clapped his hat on more securely, and marched in.

"The young rascal!" said the second sentry to himself. And by turning his head slightly—for a sentry learns to see all around like a horse, without twisting his neck—he watched the runaway into the palace.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto went up the stone staircase. Here and there he passed guards who stared and saluted. Had he not been obsessed with the vision of Miss Braithwaite, he would have known that relief fol-

lowed in his wake. Messengers clattered down the staircase to the court yard. Other messengers, breathless and eager, flew to that lighted wing where the council sat, and where the old king, propped up in bed, waited and fought terror.

His eyes, weary with many years of ruling, of disappointments and bitterness, roved the room. They came to rest at last on the photograph of a young man, which stood on his bedside table.

He was a very young man, in a uniform. He was boyish, and smiling. There was a dog beside him, and its head was on his knee. Wherever one stood in the room, the eyes of the photograph gazed at one. The king knew this, and because he was quite old, and because there were few people to whom a king dares to speak his inmost thoughts, he frequently spoke to the photograph. The older he grew, the more he felt, sometimes, as though it knew what he said.

"If they've got him," he said now to the picture, "it is out of my hands, and into yours, my boy."

Much of his life had been spent in waiting, in waiting for a son, in waiting for that son to grow to be a man, in waiting while that son in his turn loved and married and begot a man-child, in waiting, when that son had died a violent death, for the time when his tired hands could relinquish the scepter to his grandchild.

Quite suddenly the door opened. The old man turned his head. Just inside stood a very dirty small boy.

The Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto was most terribly frightened. Everything was at sixes and sevens. Miss Braithwaite had been crying her head off, and on seeing him had fallen in a faint. Not that he thought it was a real faint. He had unmistakably seen her eyelids quiver. And when she came to she had ordered him no supper, and four pages of German translation, and to go to bed at seven o'clock instead of seven-thirty for a week. All the time crying, too. And then she had sent him to his grandfather, and taken aromatic ammonia.

His grandfather said nothing, but looked at him.

"Here—here I am, sir," said the crown prince from the door.

The king drew a long breath. But the silence persisted. Prince Ferdinand William Otto furtively rubbed a dusty shoe against the back of a trousers leg.

"I'm afraid I'm not very neat, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, and took a step forward. Until his grandfather commanded him, he could not advance into the room.

"Come here," said the king.

He went to the side of the bed.

"Where have you been?"

"I'm afraid—I ran away, sir."

"Why?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered. It was rather an awful moment. "I don't exactly know. I just thought I would."

You see, it was really extremely difficult. To say that he was tired of



"Here I Am, Sir," Said the Crown Prince.

things as they were would sound ungrateful. Would, indeed, be most impolite. And then, exactly why had he run away?

"Suppose," said the king, "you draw up a chair and tell me about it. We'd better talk it over, I think."

His royal highness drew up a chair, and sat on it. His feet not reaching the floor, he hooked them around the chair rung. This was permissible because, first, the king could not see them from his bed. Second, it kept his knees from shaking.

"Probably you are aware," said the

king, "that you have alarmed a great many people."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't think—" "A prince's duty is to think. Where did you go?"

"To the park, sir. I—I thought I'd like to see the park by myself. It's very hard to enjoy things with Miss Braithwaite, sir. She does not really enjoy the things I like. Nikky and I—"

"By 'Nikky' you mean Lieutenant Larisch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on."

"We like the same things, sir—the Pike's Peak-or-Bust, and all that."

The king raised himself on his elbow. "What was that?" he demanded.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto blushed, and explained. It was Bobby's name for the peak at the top of the scenic railway. He had been on the railway. He had been—his enthusiasm carried him away. His cheeks flushed. He sat forward on the edge of his chair, and gesticulated.

"I was awfully happy, sir," he ended.

"It feels like flying, only safer. And the lights are pretty. It's like fairyland. There were two or three times when it seemed as if we'd turn over, or leap the track. But we didn't."

The king lay back and thought. More than anything in the world he loved this boy. But the occasion demanded a strong hand. "You were happy," he said. "You were disobedient, you were causing grave anxiety and distress—and you were happy! The first duty of a prince is to his country. His first lesson is to obey laws. He must always obey certain laws. A king is but the servant of his people. Some day you will be the king. You are being trained for that high office now. And yet you would set the example of insubordination, disobedience, and reckless disregard of the feelings of others."

"Yes, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, feeling very small and ashamed.

"Not only that. You slipped away. You did not go openly. You sneaked off, like a thief. Are you proud of it?"

"No, sir."

"I shall," said the king, "require no promise from you. Promises are poor things to hold to. I leave this matter in your own hands, Otto. You will be punished by Miss Braithwaite, and for the next ten days you will not visit me. You may go now."

Otto got off his chair. He was feeling exceedingly crushed. "Good night, sir," he said. And waited for his grandfather to extend his hand. But the old king lay looking straight ahead, with his mouth set in grim lines, and his hands folded over his breast.

At the door the crown prince turned and bowed. His grandfather's eyes were fixed on the two gold eagles over the door, but the photograph on the table appeared to be smiling at him.

Until late that night General Mettlich and the king talked together. The king had been lifted from his bed and sat propped in a great chair. Above his shabby dressing gown his face showed gaunt and old. In a straight chair facing him sat his old friend and chancellor.

"What it has shown is not entirely bad," said the king, after a pause. "The boy has initiative. And he made no attempt at evasion. He is essentially truthful."

"What it has also shown, sire, is that no protection is enough. When I, who love the lad, and would—when I could sleep, and let him get away, as I did—"

"The truth is," said the king, "we are both of us getting old." He tapped with his gnarled fingers on the blanket that lay over his knees. "The truth is also," he observed a moment later, "that the boy has very few pleasures. He is alone a great deal."

General Mettlich raised his shaggy head. Many years of wearing a soldier's cap had not injured his heavy gray hair. He had bristling eyebrows, white now, and a short, fighting mustache. When he was irritated, or disagreed with any one, his eyebrows came down and the mustache went up. Many years of association with his king had given him the right to talk to him as man to man. They even quarreled now and then. It was a brave man who would quarrel with old Ferdinand II.

So now his eyebrows came down and his mustache went up. "How—alone, sire?"

"You do not regard that bigoted English woman as a companion, do you?"

"She is a thoughtful and conscientious woman, sire," he said stiffly. It happened that he had selected her. "She does her duty. And as to the boy being lonely, he has no time to be lonely. His tutors—"

"How old is he?"

"Ten next month."

The king said nothing for a time. Then—"It is hard," he said at last, "for seventy-four to see with the eyes of ten. As for this afternoon—why in the name of a thousand devils did they take him to see the 'Flying Dutchman'? I detect it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)